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SUBJECT: UNECE - Economic Development and Climate Change

REF: Geneva 121

¶1. SUMMARY: At the last session of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (ECE), the high-level segment of the meeting focused on economic development in the ECE region and the regional aspects of climate change mitigation and adaptation. Other items on the agenda included ECE reform and reform of the Environment for Europe (Efe) process. The meeting outcome took the form of a decision that reaffirmed ECE reform, postponed review of meeting biennialization, endorsed the Efe reform plan, approved the terms of reference for Timber Committee, and empowered the Executive Committee to take action to improve the Committee on Trade. The ECE also decided not to pursue the development of an early warning mechanism with the OSCE. Overall the meeting was efficient and effective, although the substantive discussions on climate change may have had limited value-added to the audience of mostly staff and local diplomats. End Summary.

BACKGROUND

¶2. UNECE held its sixty-third session March 30 - April 1 2009. The fifty-six member UNECE is a valuable resource for global standards setting, technical assistance (particularly in non-EU Europe, Caucuses and Central Asia) and regional policy discussions.

¶3. At its 60th Session in 2005, the UN ECE adopted a set of reforms intended to improve the effectiveness of the Commission. The 2005 ECE Work Plan incorporated the reforms, which defined focused subprograms and more streamlined management and decision-making structures. In line with the reformed Work Plan, the 62nd ECE Session in 2007 provided strategic direction on specific themes for the 2009 session, including climate change and economic development of the ECE region. The 2009 thematic sessions subsequently highlighted the ECE role in the dialogue on regional economic and trade issues, which include transport and environment. It also included a detailed discussion on climate change, which was well-balanced and focused on the regional implementation and coordination role of the ECE in mainstreaming activities to address climate change.

ECE Reform

¶4. The Commission took several reform-related decisions at the 63rd Session. However, the ECE decided that it is too early to assess the change in frequency of ECE Sessions, which became biennial in 2007, so it will revisit the question in 2011. Although the ECE is improving and enhancing cooperation with other regional and international actors, it also decided not to pursue the development of an early warning mechanism with the OSCE (this mechanism had been included in the 2005 Work Plan). The Committee endorsed the Efe reform plan, approved the terms of reference for Timber Committee, and empowered the Executive Committee (EXCOM) to take action to increase the relevance of and participation in the Committee on

Trade.

¶5. The Executive Committee (EXCOM) serves as the standing governing body of the ECE between official sessions. Meeting once a month, the EXCOM reviews the work of all Sectoral Committees and approves their work programs and the establishment and renewal of any subsidiary bodies. Another result of the 2005 reforms, the EXCOM governing structure has been successful in improving efficiency, coordination and communication between the components of the ECE. In 2006 the EXCOM revised the ECE Technical Cooperation Strategy. It also took action over the biennium. The EXCOM also maintains focus on the three cross-sectoral issues identified in the Work Plan: Millennium Development Goals, gender, and the private sector and NGOs. Management achievements for the biennium include actions to improve planning, monitoring and evaluation, communication, resource mobilization and website usability. Review of Sectoral Committees will occur in 2011.

EfE Reform

¶6. The Commission endorsed the draft Environment for Europe (EfE) Process reforms, which the UNECE's Committee on Environmental Policy (CEP) had adopted in January 2009 after lengthy negotiations. The EfE process is anchored by periodic Ministerial Conferences, which had historically been resource-intensive with limited benefit. As a result of reforms, the 2011 EfE ministerial conference in Kazakhstan will now focus on just two themes and produce a negotiated outcome document limited to two pages. (reftel)

Other issues

¶7. ECE Executive Secretary Kubis closed with a summary of recurring themes expressed by Member State representatives:

- Prioritizing demand-driven work and projects
- A focus on membership-driven programs
- The importance of the political role of the Commission as a regional unifier
- The vital technical role of the UNECE in producing pragmatic results
- The importance of member feedback
- The need to improve visibility and increase the relevance of the UNECE, particularly in NY.

¶8. During the next biennium, the Executive Committee Bureau will consist of Belgium as President, with Vice Presidents Kyrgyzstan and Serbia. Kyrgyzstan noted its intention to seek the presidency of the Bureau.

Comment

¶9. Overall the meeting was efficient and effective, although the substantive discussions on climate change may have limited value-added to the audience of mostly UN staff and local diplomats. The UNECE is still a vitally important technical and coordinating body for the European Region that also directly influences and develops global standards. The UNECE has not been a political priority for the U.S. although most U.S. agencies and the U.S. Chamber of Commerce are active in its technical work. We are particularly engaged in transport, timber, environment and electronic standards, although we could be more engaged in other aspects, such as housing. Kubis joined the UNECE in February and brings solid experience from the EU and OSCE. He intends to increase the political profile of the UNECE.

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